

The following success story was submitted by Rose Hudson, one of the leaders of the C-U SRTS Project. She and Cynthia Hoyle have been the driving force behind Safe Routes in Champaign-Urbana, and have worked diligently to create a strong coalition of supporters in the community. This story is specifically focused on the creation of Park and Walk programs in the Districts.

In Champaign - Urbana we have two entirely different school districts in that Urbana schools are neighborhood schools. In Champaign, however, the schools are schools of choice, so a very small percentage of the students are actually close enough to walk or bike. So I have individualized plans for many of the schools in both Champaign and Urbana.

In both districts we have tried to make the distance of the park and walk fairly short in hopes of getting more families to participate and maybe in the future, we can move the boundaries out more. But for two of our Champaign schools, we have designated park and walk areas no more than two blocks from the schools over two years ago and they have both stayed fairly active. By having the short distance, many of the families do park and walk to meet their students, but some of them have used this as their designated meet up point for after school. So sometimes the parents walk up to the school and sometimes they have their child meet them at the vehicle. Either way, it has decreased some of the traffic at the schools. I have chatted with a few of them and they talk about how convenient it is to not be "in that line" and that they get home much quicker by walking a few blocks to their car.

In Urbana, we have just started a park and walk program with a school that I am also organizing a frequent walker club at. The park and walk is just across the street from the school, but the school has a very long entrance to the actual building. What we did in picking the location is actually having the families park and walk to the adult paid crossing guard that is available and utilize that crossing guard to go across the street. In speaking with the principal, she has been amazed at how many families are utilizing this program and they enjoy the time before and after school to spend with their student. Now that we are organizing a frequent walker club here, we are offering extra punches on a special park and walk punch card to again enforce the program, but also offer extra incentives (glitter toe tokens for their frequent walker club chains) to continue using this and to hopefully get even more families involved. So that teachers are not trying to keep track of extra cards, parents will be given the park and walk punch card and bring it up to school with them for that day's punch. As with the frequent walker club, when the card is full, the student turns it in for their reward.

So as you can see, individualizing is a key component to getting a good stronghold with the families. I have been lucky in that all the schools I have worked with have been very receptive so in turn, endorse the program to their school families. I have been very impressed with the number of families that have stuck with this program at the schools that we started at two years ago and am looking into helping a few more get one started as well. I think you have to be realistic in keeping the distance short, at least to begin with, or you will have too much resistance from the families of "how much time it takes to walk that far". I have noticed that we are also getting more schools to organize bus drops for our yearly Walk & Bike To School Day so that bus students can participate in walking to school on that day for even just a few blocks or some have been for 3 - 4 blocks. I would be happy to give more detailed information if you have any

specific questions. Believe me, if I can get this going in some of our Champaign schools, you can get it started in your school district!